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**Wheelchair Supply Business Owner Sentenced to 41 Months in Prison
for Role in Health Care Fraud Conspiracy**

United States Attorney Richard B. Roper announced today that Okon Eyo Idiong, owner of a durable medical equipment (wheelchair supply) company, was sentenced today by the Honorable Barefoot Sanders, United States Senior District Judge, to 41 months imprisonment. Idiong, who has been in custody since his arrest in Detroit, Michigan, in December 2004 on charges outlined in a federal criminal complaint, was also ordered to pay \$2,239,967.00 in restitution. In addition, two automobiles were seized and administratively forfeited to the government in this investigation. The proceeds of their sale will be remitted to the Medicare program.

In January 2005, Idiong pled guilty to two counts of a superseding indictment that charged him, and two other medical equipment (wheelchair supply) company owners, Aniekeme B. Akpabot, owner of Mina Medical Equipment and Supplies in Mesquite, Texas and Aniefiok Jimmy Eking, owner of Medical Equipment and Supplies and Mescorp Pharmaceuticals, in Houston, Texas, with various offenses related to their role in a health care fraud conspiracy. These three defendants are the main players in a fraud scheme that spread across the southern and southwestern United States and according to the Department of Health and Human Services, more than \$27 million in false Medicare billings is attributed to them. Defendant Eking has also been indicted in the Southern District of Texas on related charges; defendants Eking and Akpabot remain fugitives.

Idiong, who owned OK Medical Equipment and Supplies in Southfield, Michigan, admitted that beginning in July 2002, and continuing until approximately August 26, 2003, he, along with Akpabot and Eking, conspired with each other, and others, to defraud the

Medicare program in connection with the delivery of and payment for wheelchairs and accessories and to commit money laundering with the fraudulently obtained proceeds. The conspiracy involved the defendants soliciting Medicare patients in several ways and obtaining Certificates of Medical Necessity and prescriptions for wheelchairs from various physicians who were willing participants in the conspiracy. The defendants paid the recruiters for locating Medicare patients and coordinating physical evaluations and also paid the physicians for obtaining the fraudulent Certificates of Medical Necessity and the power wheelchair prescriptions. The defendants would bill Medicare for the top-of-the-line K0011 power wheelchair, but either never delivered any wheelchair at all to the Medicare patients, or delivered a far less expensive scooter to the Medicare patients. Typically Medicare was billed from \$8000 - \$10,000 for the motorized wheelchairs. For each claim they submitted, the wheelchair suppliers would receive approximately \$5000 from Medicare.

In documents filed in court, Idiong, admitted that he and the other participants in the scheme caused Medicare to pay approximately \$2.4 million of fraudulently obtained proceeds to Idiong. He also admitted that he used a portion of the Medicare proceeds to purchase patient files and information from co-defendant Aniefiok Jimmy Eking. Idiong also admitted using a portion of the fraudulently obtained Medicare money to purchase a Lexus LX470 and other assets.

U.S. Attorney Roper especially recognized the investigative efforts and teamwork of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations. In addition, he praised the investigative efforts of the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation; the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The case is being prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Kimberly Priest and Assistant United States Attorney John DeLaGarza.